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ABSTRACT

This newsletter issue focuses on the subject of mandatory testing of prospective teachers prior to certification. The following questions are discussed: (1) What are the major types of teacher tests? (2) How prevalent are teacher tests? (3) What are the major teacher tests? (4) What problems do teacher testing programs address? (5) What are the potential drawbacks? (6) What are some of the arguments against teacher tests? (7) What legal precedents have been established? (8) What is involved in implementing a teacher testing program? (9) How is teacher testing viewed by various organizations and groups? and (10) Where is teacher testing headed in the near future? A summary of the states requiring testing is presented in a table. (JD)

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TESTING TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OUR SCHOOL TEACHERS

Can a state effectively boost the caliber of its school teachers by obligating them to pass a test? Do teacher tests promote excellence? Do they provide rigorous standards? The actions of 48 states clearly indicate a widening acceptance of the concept of teacher testing. Every state except Alaska and Iowa has adopted or is in the process of adopting some form of a teacher testing program.

As of April 1987, 44 states had implemented or decided to initiate a program requiring prospective teachers to pass a written test before being awarded full certification. Twenty-seven states were testing or planning to test applicants for admission to teacher education programs. Three states were testing veteran teachers as a requirement for recertification. Thirty-nine states have implemented or are considering implementing internship programs which involve an assessment component. Several of the states with alternative certification programs incorporate testing components. Finally, at least two states, Florida and Tennessee, are beginning to test teachers as part of merit pay plans.

While virtually all states have made some form of commitment to teacher testing, the diversity of philosophies and attitudes toward the issue is substantial. States differ in terms of when they test prospective teachers, what their tests cover, the difficulty of their instruments, and which tests are used. The issue of teacher testing covers not only whether teachers should be tested, but also how they should be tested and when. Virtually every aspect of teacher testing has been subject to considerable debate.

To illuminate the issues, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) recently released a comprehensive, plain-language report, What's Happening in Teacher Testing, designed for policy and program planners. Issues involved in teacher testing are outlined, and state-level activities are described.

The following questions and answers provide an overview of teacher testing and an introduction to the issues developed more fully in the USDE report.[1]

1. What are the major types of teacher tests?

   There are four major types:

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This issue of Capital Ideas was written by Lawrence M. Rudner, PhD, formerly a Senior Associate with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions and suggestions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education or the National Governors' Association. Mention of trade names, commercial products, programs, organizations, ideas or suggestions does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education or its officials.

a) Admissions tests are given to prospective teachers before they are admitted to a teacher preparation program, typically within a college or university. These tests usually assess basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. Twenty-seven states are implementing such programs.

b) Certification tests are given to prospective teachers either after they exit a teacher preparation program or before initial certification. These usually test knowledge about teaching and the teaching profession as well as basic skills. Several states also test for subject matter knowledge within an area of specialization. Forty-four states are implementing such programs, making certification tests the most common form of teacher testing at the present time.

c) Recertification tests are given to practicing classroom teachers as a condition for recertification. Three states have such programs.

d) Performance assessments are administered to beginning teachers, usually during their first year of teaching. The characteristics of a teacher's teaching style are observed by trained personnel, usually a mentor teacher, the principal, and a teacher education professor. These assessments usually assist the beginning teacher as well as determine whether the beginning teacher will be eligible for regular, non-provisional certification. Seven states have programs that use observation instruments. Another 17 states are either in the process of implementing such a program or are in the planning and studying phase.

The first three types of tests--admissions, certification, and recertification--do not test actual teaching ability. Rather, they test knowledge and skills believed to be prerequisites to teaching, and many test knowledge about teaching. Ability to teach decimal multiplication to children, for example, is not covered. Ability to multiply decimals, however, is. The tests do not evaluate many important human qualities such as dedication, caring, perseverance, sensitivity, and integrity, and they cannot guarantee that an individual who passes will become a good teacher.[2] In principle, however, they can guarantee that an individual who passes is literate and/or knows the subject matter.

2. How prevalent are teacher tests?

As shown in Table 1, every state except Alaska and Iowa has some form of teacher testing program or is in the process of implementing one. As of April 1987, the cutoff date for state-specific information herein, 24 states tested applicants to teacher education programs, 26 states tested individuals as a requirement for initial teacher certification, three states tested veteran teachers, and seven states used a formal observation instrument to assess the performance of beginning teachers. Several states plan to implement new or revised testing programs in the next few years.

Table 1. A Summary of State Teacher Testing Programs, April 1987

State	Admissions Tests			Certification Tests			Recert. Tests	Performance Tests	
	Test	implementation		Test	implementation				
		in place	when		in place	when	in place	in place	under study
ALABAMA	Custom	X		Custom	X				
ALASKA									
ARIZONA	PPST	X		Custom	X				X
ARKANSAS				NTE		?	X		
CALIFORNIA	CBEST	X		CBEST	X				
COLORADO	CAT	X		--		1987			
CONNECTICUT	Custom	X		NTE		1987			X
DELAWARE				PPST	X				X
FLORIDA	SAT,ACT	X		Custom	X			X	
GEORGIA				Custom	X		X	X	
HAWAII				NTE	X				
IDAHO				NTE		?			
ILLINOIS				Custom		1988			
INDIANA	?		?	NTE	X				
IOWA									
KANSAS				PPST,NTE	X				X
KENTUCKY	CTBS	X		NTE	X			X	
LOUISIANA	NTE	X		NTE	X				
MAINE				NTE		1988			
MARYLAND				NTE		1987			X
MASSACHUSETTS				?		1989			X
MICHIGAN				?		?			
MINNESOTA				PPST		1988			X
MISSISSIPPI	COMP	X		NTE	X				X
MISSOURI	SAT,ACT	X		?		1987			
MONTANA				NTE	X				
NEBRASKA	PPST		1987	PPST		1987			
NEVADA	PPST	X		PPST		1990			X
NEW HAMPSHIRE				PPST	X				
NEW JERSEY				NTE	X				
NEW MEXICO	Misc	X		NTE	X				
NEW YORK				NTE	X				X
NO CAROLINA	NTE	X		NTE	X			X	
NORTH DAKOTA	NTE	X		?		?			
OHIO	?		1987	?		1987			
OKLAHOMA	Misc	X		Custom	X			X	
OREGON	CBEST	X		CBEST	X				
PENNSYLVANIA				NTE		1987			X
RHODE ISLAND				NTE	X				X
SO CAROLINA	Custom	X		NTE,Custom	X			X	
SOUTH DAKOTA				NTE		?			X
TENNESSEE	PPST	X		NTE	X				
TEXAS	PPST	X		Custom	X		X		X
VIRGINIA				NTE	X			X	
UTAH	Misc	X							
VERMONT									X
WASHINGTON	Custom, SAT,ACT	X							
WEST VIRGINIA	PPST,COMP	X		Custom	X				X
WISCONSIN	PPST		1989	?		1987			
WYOMING	CAT	X							X
Totals	27	23	4	44	26	18	3	7	17

ACT, CAT, CBEST, COMP, CTBS, PPST, SAT refer to the American College Testing Program, California Achievement Test, California Basic Education Skills Test, College Outcomes Measures Project, California Test of Basic Skills, Pre Professional Skills Test, and the Scholastic Aptitude Test, respectively.

? indicates items that have not yet been decided.

3. What are the major teacher tests?

The test most commonly-used for admission to teacher education programs is the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST), produced by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, NJ. Seven states use this test as part of their admissions testing program. The PPST covers basic reading, writing, and mathematics. Candidates have 2 1/2 hours to take the test.

The NTE Programs, formerly called the National Teacher Examinations, is the most frequently-used test for teacher certification, and is also produced by the Educational Testing Service. Parts of this battery of tests are or will be used in 22 state teacher testing programs. The NTE is composed of a Core Battery covering the communication skills of listening, reading, and writing; the general knowledge of social studies, mathematics, literature and fine arts, and science; and the professional knowledge of teaching. The complete Core Battery contains 340 multiple choice questions and one essay item. It requires 5 1/2 hours to complete. The NTE also contains subject-specific tests in 26 fields, with new tests added frequently.

National Evaluation Systems (NES) of Amherst, Massachusetts, is the second major producer of teacher tests. Concentrating on custom-made teacher certification tests, NES has developed more than 250 tests in over 90 content areas for several states.

In addition to the Educational Testing Service and National Evaluation Systems, a number of test suppliers and consultants are also active in this burgeoning field.

4. What problems do teacher testing programs address?

Testing is viewed as one of several ways to improve teacher quality and the quality of American education. As stated by Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas, "To those who feel insulted by the test, I can only reply that I think it is a small price to pay in exchange for the biggest tax increase for education in Arkansas history and for the contribution the testing process would make in our efforts to restore the teaching profession to the position of public trust and esteem it deserves."[3]

Test-enforced standards for admission to teacher preparation programs and for initial certification are seen by proponents as means to "screen out" unqualified individuals, to strengthen the profession, and to attract better-qualified candidates. As a result of these programs, the public's confidence in teachers, teaching, and schools is expected to improve.[4]

The need for tougher admissions and certification is reflected in A Nation At Risk,[5] the celebrated 1983 report of the National Commission of Excellence in Education, which found that "not enough of the academically able students are being attracted to teaching," and that "too many teachers are being drawn from the bottom quarter of the graduating high school and college students."

After studying trends in college admissions tests scores, one researcher stated that "teaching never enjoyed a golden age when the best and the brightest entered the ranks."[6] The average Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) verbal and mathematics scores of teachers and prospective teachers have typically been 40 to 50 points below national averages.[7]

Not only have the schools been unable to attract the best and the brightest, they have been unable to keep them. Teachers with the highest SAT scores leave the profession in greater numbers than those with lower SAT scores.[8]

5. What are the potential drawbacks?

There are at least two potential disadvantages to quantitative standards for teacher education program admissions and certification: 1) policies that restrict entrance to the profession may contribute to a teacher shortage, and 2) a disproportionate number of minority students fail to gain entry into the teaching field because of low pass rates on the tests.[9]

If passing rates are an indication, admissions testing programs appear to be successful in restricting access to teacher preparation programs. For the states providing data, the average passing rate is approximately 72 percent.[10] Certification examinations, which are given to individuals who have completed teacher training programs, appear to be less restrictive; the state average passing rate in these cases is approximately 83 percent.

The impact of testing programs on minorities has been severe. Only 23 percent of blacks and 34 percent of Hispanics, for example, passed the Texas admissions test between March 1984 and March 1985.[11] In Louisiana, only 10 percent of students graduating from predominantly black colleges between 1978 and 1984 passed the certification test.[12] In 1980, minority teachers constituted approximately 12.5 percent of the national teaching force. This proportion may be reduced to 5 percent or less by 1990 if the current trends involving passing rates, as well as enrollment and attrition rates, continue.[13]

6. What are some of the arguments against teacher tests?

In addition to the two concerns cited above, some of the arguments against teacher testing are:[14]

a) Testing alone many not improve teacher quality, though it has the potential of "screening out" individuals whose academic preparation is weak. Rewards and working conditions are the most important factors in teacher recruitment.[15] The academic quality of teachers is probably affected more by the dynamics of supply and demand and by the luster and standards of the profession, than by testing or certification requirements.[16]

b) The tests reflect an overreaction to a problem that may not exist. The public is not as concerned with teacher quality as the media suggest, and difficulty in hiring teachers is not a high-ranking concern.[17]

c) The tests are inappropriate. Skills needed in one situation may not be necessary in another. Teaching in inner city schools, for example, is not the same as teaching in suburban schools.[18] Tests emphasize lower order skills.[19] They do not adequately represent what a teacher should know and be able to do.[20] The tests emphasize knowledge, not performance, ethical values, creativity, emotional maturity, or attitudes.[21]

d) Testing will hurt the profession. More constraints by the state, such as testing, will result in greater teacher militancy.[22] Tests eliminate diversity and flexibility in teacher education programs.[23]

e) The tests provide an insufficient standard. They cover skills that are not important, and passing scores are so low that passing the test does not prove anything.[24]

7. What legal precedents have been established?

Teacher tests for certification resemble other forms of employment tests and must meet certain legal standards. Griggs v. Duke Power Company, for example, established that employment tests must measure skills actually needed for a job when the test adversely affects groups protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[25]

Since the early 1970s, the use of teacher certification tests has been argued in several courts. The landmark case, United States v. South Carolina, established that states can use written tests that have been designed and validated to disclose the minimum amount of knowledge necessary for effective teaching.[26]

Based on case law, certain guidelines appear prudent: a) tests affecting job status should be shown to be job-related and serve legitimate school objectives; b) instruments should be constructed by qualified professionals; c) the instruments should be validated for the specific jobs for which they are used; and d) individuals should be provided with adequate notice of the test requirements.

8. What is involved in implementing a teacher testing program?

State-sponsored teacher testing programs must begin with the authority for such a program. This usually stems from either legislative or board of education action. There is usually widespread participation of concerned constituencies in the development of the policies. Instruments are then examined, validation studies are conducted, passing scores are established, and information materials are prepared. A system for monitoring and reporting the results of the program is also developed.[27]

Costs to the state depend upon the tests selected, the complexity of the policy, the system of monitoring and reporting, and the charges to the examinee. The most expensive route is for the state to have a custom-made test developed and then to pay for its administration. Teacher tests cost approximately $50,000-$100,00 to develop, and $5,000-$50,00 to validate.[28]

A test program consisting of a basic skills test and 25 subject matter tests can cost close to $1,000,000 to develop and over $100 per examinee to administer and score. These costs do not include the costs for a state department of education to manage and evaluate the program.

The least expensive route is to use a ready-made, nationally-recognized instrument and have the candidates pay for administration costs. A testing program using an off-the-shelf basic skills test and 25 subject matter tests would cost approximately $100,000 to validate.[29] Scoring and administration costs would be the same, approximately $100 per examinee.

States vary greatly with regard to their commitment to teacher testing. Some states have unfunded mandates and are consequently inactive in this area. Others appear to be establishing a program in name only. A few pilot states, however, have made a serious commitment and are spending millions of dollars each year for teacher training and assessment.

9. How is teacher testing viewed by various organizations and groups?

Many organizations and groups support fair and objective evaluation. Their definitions of fair and objective evaluation, however, differ. There is often disagreement regarding who should be evaluated, what should be evaluated, and how evaluation should be conducted. The following is an abbreviated list of several attitudes toward teacher testing:

- National Education Association (NEA) -- NEA has a history of questioning inappropriate and unfair testing practices and has been actively involved in precedent-setting student and teacher testing litigation. While NEA was originally against the use of the National Teacher Examinations,[30] the organization recently adopted a stance in favor of requiring prospective teachers to pass valid professional knowledge and subject matter tests. NEA remains opposed to testing veteran teachers.

- American Federation of Teachers (AFT) -- AFT has been a long time advocate of testing and has supported the use of "accurate and appropriate measures to certify teachers."[31] In 1985, AFT took an even stronger stance when its president announced that the association was willing to limit its membership to individuals passing a rigorous teacher competency test.[32]

- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) -- "In recognition of the need for quality teacher education, AACTE supports a test of basic skills as a criterion for entry or continuance in teacher education programs."[33]

- Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) -- The Council recommended that a system for assessing and screening prospective teacher candidates be implemented in every state.[34]

- Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy -- This group has stated that a national board for professional teaching is needed to establish high standards for the profession. Assessment will be a key aspect of its board certification program.[35]

- Holmes Group (a consortium of university-based schools of education) -- The Holmes group "commits itself to develop and administer a series of professional teacher examinations that will provide a credible basis for issuing teaching credentials and licenses."[36]

- General Public -- In the 1986 Gallup Poll, 85 percent of the public believed that prospective teachers should be required to pass a state examination to prove their knowledge in the subjects they plan to teach.[37]

- Teachers -- In the 1984 Gallup Poll, 63 percent of the classroom teachers believed that prospective teachers should be required to pass a state

examination.[38] In a 1986 readership survey, "Instructor" magazine found that 59 percent of the respondents would support a fair and valid teacher evaluation system.[39]

10. Where is teacher testing headed in the near future?

It takes several years to implement a teacher testing program. In the immediate future, we can expect to see the programs that were adopted several years ago being carried out for the first time. During 1987, for example, nine states will be starting certification tests, and three states will be starting admissions tests. In 1987, one of the states with recertification testing will be releasing the final results of its two-year program.

Most new activity in the area of teacher testing will involve assessment programs for beginning teachers. Certification requirements in many states are being altered to require several years of demonstrated successful teaching experience prior to being awarded regular certification. Thirty-nine states are considering or have established some type of formal beginning teacher programs.[40] Seven states have an existing program involving an observation instrument; another 17 states are either planning or studying observation systems.

After the May 1986 release of A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century,[41] the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy is destined to become a major player in the area of teacher testing. It is funding several large research studies which it believes will lead to the establishment of a board certification program providing high standards and recognizing master teachers meeting those standards. The board members will be announced in the fall of 1987.

11. What questions concerning teacher testing have not yet been answered?

Some important questions that have yet to be satisfactorily answered are:

a) Does the ability to perform on an admission, certification, or recertification test relate significally to classroom performance?

b) Do teacher testing programs actually yield improved public confidence?

c) Do existing observation instruments accurately indicate everyday classroom behaviors?

d) Which other modes of assessment beyond paper and pencil tests can be used for improved teacher testing?

e) What are the lower limits of knowledge and skill necessary to teach different ages and different subjects effectively?

These unanswered questions challenge some of the basic assumptions behind current teacher testing practice. Answers to these questions, especially the last question, could indicate a need for radically different forms of testing.

NOTES

1. Copies of the report, What's Happening in Teacher Testing, can be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

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5. U.S. Department of Education. A Nation at Risk. Washington, DC, 1983.

6. Sykes, G. "Teacher Preparation and the Teacher Workforce: Problems and Prospects for the '80s." American Education, March 1983, pp. 23-29.

7. Ibid.; and Stern, J.D. and Williams, M.F. (eds.) The Condition of Education, 1986 Edition. Washington, DC: Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1986, p. 66.

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9. Sandefur, op.cit.

10. The average of the passing rates provided by the states. The average passing rate statistics must be viewed as a rough approximation. State passing rate can refer to the percentage of individuals passing per administration or the percentage of individuals who ultimately pass after repeated attempts. For states only reporting pass rates by subtests (e.g., professional knowledge, reading), the lowest figure provided was used. The average state pass rate was not weighted to control for the number of people taking the test in each state.

11. Smith, G.P. "Unresolved Issues and New Developments in Teacher Competency Testing." Urban Educator, 8, 1986, pp. 1-16.

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16. Weaver, W.T. "Solving the Problem of Teacher Quality, Part 2." Phi Delta Kappan, 66, 1984, pp. 185-188.

17. Pugach and Raths, op. cit.

18. Sikula, J.P. "Concerns about Teacher Competency Tests in Indiana." The Teacher Educator, 20, 1984, pp. 14-19.

19. Thurston, P. and House, E. "The NIE Adversary Hearing on Minimum Competency Testing." Phi Delta Kappan, 63, 1981, pp. 87-89.

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22. Killian, M.G. "Local Control: The Vanishing Myth in Texas." Phi Delta Kappan, 66, 1984, pp. 192-195.

23. Sikula, op. cit.; and Pugach and Raths, op. cit.

24. See quotations in Shepard, L.A., Kreitzer, A.E. and Graue, M.E. "A Case Study of the Texas Teacher Test: Technical Report." Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Center on Student Testing, Evaluation and Standards, 1987.

25. Griggs v. Duke Power Company, 401 U.S. 424 (1971).

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27. Sandefur, op. cit.

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This issue of Capital Ideas was edited by Sondra Nelson, Office of Research and Development, NGA Center for Policy Research.

Capital Ideas is published periodically by the National Governors' Association Center for Policy Research. It reviews research activities and findings on a variety of subjects and discusses issues of current interest to states. Subject area codes, listed below, are shown on page one, along with year of publication and issue of publication for that year. **Capital Ideas** also provides an opportunity for open exchange of information among states, with issues focusing on innovative programs in states, as well as new ideas and experiments.

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